

**This Week In Congress**

*April 12, 2004*

Dear Friend,

Welcome to &quot;This Week in Congress.&quot; I hope you find this newsletter useful.

**Traveling in Kansas**

During the past week, I have had the opportunity to visit with Kansans from across our state due to Congress being out-of-session for the spring congressional work period. These two weeks allows me the opportunity to visit with folks about the issues they are facing and to discuss ways that lawmakers can meet those challenges.

### **Bringing Physicians to Kansas Communities**

Senator Sam Brownback and I recently introduced legislation to reauthorize a program to recruit physicians to serve in rural areas. The J-1 visa waiver program, set to expire on June 1, 2004, allows foreign-born, U.S.-educated physicians to practice in rural areas that have a shortage of physicians or specialty doctors.

The J-1 visa program gives international medical graduates the opportunity to stay in the U.S. if they agree to practice in areas that are experiencing a shortage of doctors. Since 1993, 115 foreign doctors have served in Kansas communities through this program, and 67 physicians, or 58 percent, have remained in practice in the state following the completion of their three-year service obligation.

For many areas across our country, this program is the only way that rural hospitals can get qualified physicians to serve in their communities. By retaining this program, hospitals and clinics are allowed to hire physicians, who have studied and trained in medical schools throughout the United States, to practice in areas that might not otherwise have a doctor.

### **Showing Strength for Ft. Riley in Junction City**

On Wednesday evening, I attended the Show of Strength Banquet in Junction City. The annual event, hosted by the Old Trooper Regiment, was held in conjunction with Ft. Riley's Congressional Staffers day. Each year, congressional staff members from the Kansas delegation come out to Ft. Riley to tour the post and talk to soldiers and commanding officers to get a better picture of the importance of Ft. Riley to the Kansas economy and the role it plays in our nation's defense.

The keynote speaker for the banquet was a former commanding general at Ft. Riley, Lt. Gen. Michael Dodson. Lt. Gen Dodson spoke about the importance of Ft. Riley during the Global War on Terrorism. Maj. Gen. Dennis Hardy, the current commanding general of the installation, also spoke about his support of his troops serving overseas.

Also in attendance was John Montgomery, the civilian aid to the Army. I would also like to thank Scott Stuckey and Dr. Casey Thomas for their hard work in putting this event together.

### **Awarding the Purple Heart to Gier-Lewison**

On Saturday afternoon, I awarded the Purple Heart to U.S. Army 101<sup>st</sup> Division Airborne Captain Katrina Gier-Lewison of Hutchinson. I originally presented Captain Gier-Lewison with her Purple Heart when I visited Iraq in August of 2003. I was honored to be included in Katrina's celebration with her family and friends and am thankful for her service to our nation.

Gier-Lewison is a member of the U.S. Army and a 2000 graduate of West Point. She was a Blackhawk helicopter pilot during Operation Iraqi Freedom and suffered combat injuries while serving in Iraq. Gier-Lewison also wrote several columns about her time in Iraq, which were published in the *Hutchinson News*. During the reception, she showed slides and photos from her time in Iraq. Gier-Lewison and her husband and fellow Blackhawk pilot, Tyler, are currently stationed at Ft. Campbell, Kentucky.

### **Touring the Future Salt Museum**

On Tuesday morning, I joined Jay Smith, Executive Director of Kansas Underground Salt Museum Project; Lee Spence, President of the Underground Vaults & Storage, Inc.; and Max Liby, President of the Hutchinson Salt Company in a tour of the future site of the Kansas Underground Salt Museum.

The Kansas Underground Salt Museum will include interactive educational opportunities

related to mining, history, science, geology, health, economics and business. It will be the only museum of its kind in the western hemisphere, with most of the exhibits, programs and activities taking place 650 feet below ground in a working salt mine. There will be 100,000 square feet of underground exhibition space and 12,000 square feet for a visitors' center. The project will provide an estimated annual economic impact of \$10 million to the local and state economy and will create 50 new jobs.

With the Kansas Cosmosphere, the state fair and now the Underground Salt Museum, the city of Hutchinson is a leader in making Kansas a tourist destination.

### **McPherson Honors Bob Wise and the Late George Hess**

On Tuesday, I joined with the McPherson Chamber of Commerce and the McPherson Industrial Development Company in honoring the accomplishments of local philanthropists and entrepreneurs Bob Wise and the late George Hess. The men were recognized at the 2004 Pioneer Awards Luncheon for their contributions to the prosperity of McPherson. Hess was selected for his kind generosity and giving spirit throughout the years. Wise was honored for promoting job creation and economic development in McPherson.

The Governor's Business Appreciation Awards recipients were also recognized. This year's recipients were McPherson Water Products, Wear Technology, Farmers Alliance Mutual Insurance and McPherson Business Machines.

### **Visiting Businesses in Salina**

On Tuesday, I spent the morning visiting with owners, employees and patrons of Salina's downtown business district. Many folks expressed to me their concerns about the rising costs of doing business, including the effects of outsourcing and escalating health care premiums. I also stopped by the Natural Resources Conservation Service office and visited with Harold Klaege, the state conservationist.

### **Touring United Bio Energy Partners**

On Tuesday afternoon, I toured the United Bio Energy Partners in Wichita. The company opened in 2003 and offers management consulting, in addition to feed, grain and ethanol marketing for ethanol plants. Ethanol production is an important component to Kansas' economy, as it creates yet another use for our Kansas commodities. There are six ethanol plants in operation in Kansas, with several others in development. During the tour I met with Jeff Roskam, the president of United Bio Energy Partners, as well as Bernie Hoffman, Greg Krissek and Joe Wary.

### **Visiting Kansas State University**

On Thursday, I visited Kansas State University in Manhattan to view the research projects being conducted on the campus. I toured Mosier Hall and the veterinary medical complex, where students and faculty are working on testing for Bovine Spongiform Encephalopathy (BSE) and improving food safety. As a member of the House Agriculture Committee, it was useful for me to learn more about the testing process for this disease. I also visited the Advanced Manufacturing Center to learn more about ways to improve our transportation infrastructure.

### **In the Office**

In the office for a tour of the Capitol this week were John and Betty Murrell of Emporia, and their children, Jacob and Jessica. Also touring were Marty and Karen Loving of Pawnee Rock. The Lovings are the parents of Matt Loving, an intern in my Washington, D.C. office this semester.

Very truly yours,

Jerry